



Billing Code 3410-10

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Commodity Credit Corporation

Notice of Funds Availability: Inviting Applications for the Quality Samples Program

Announcement Type: New.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.605

SUMMARY: The Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) announces it is inviting proposals for the 2016 Quality Samples Program (QSP). The intended effect of this notice is to solicit applications from eligible applicants for fiscal year 2016 and to set out the criteria for the award of funds under the program in October 2015. QSP is administered by personnel of the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS).

DATES: To be considered for funding, applications must be received by 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time, [INSERT 60 CALENDAR DAYS AFTER PUBLICATION DATE]. Any applications received after this time will be considered only if funds are still available.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Entities wishing to apply for funding assistance should contact the Program Operations Division, Office of Trade Programs, Foreign Agricultural Service *by courier address:* Room 6512, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250, or *by phone:* (202) 720-4327, or *by fax:* (202) 720-9361, or *by e-mail:*

podadmin@fas.usda.gov. Information is also available on the FAS Web site at

<http://www.fas.usda.gov/programs/quality-samples-program-qsp>.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

A. Funding Opportunity Description

Authority: QSP is authorized under Section 5(f) of the CCC Charter Act, 15 U.S.C. 714c(f).

Purpose: QSP is designed to encourage the development and expansion of export markets for U.S. agricultural commodities by assisting U.S. entities in providing commodity samples to potential foreign importers to promote a better understanding and appreciation for the high quality of U.S. agricultural commodities.

QSP participants will be responsible for procuring (or arranging for the procurement of) commodity samples, exporting the samples, and providing the on-site technical assistance necessary to facilitate successful use of the samples by importers. Participants that are funded under this announcement may seek reimbursement from QSP for the sample purchase price, the cost of transporting the samples domestically to the port of export, and then to the foreign port or point of entry. Transportation costs from the foreign port or point of entry to the final destination will not be eligible for reimbursement. CCC will not reimburse the costs incidental to purchasing and transporting samples, for example, inspection or documentation fees. Although providing technical assistance is required for all projects, QSP will not reimburse the costs of providing technical assistance. A QSP participant will be reimbursed after CCC reviews its reimbursement claim and determines that the claim is complete.

General Scope of QSP Projects: QSP projects are the activities undertaken by a QSP

participant to provide an appropriate sample of a U.S. agricultural commodity to a foreign importer, or a group of foreign importers, in a given market. The purpose of the project is to provide information to an appropriate target audience regarding the attributes, characteristics, and proper use of the U.S. commodity. A QSP project addresses a single market/commodity combination.

As a general matter, QSP projects should conform to the following guidelines:

- Projects should benefit the represented U.S. industry and not a specific company or brand;
- Projects should develop a new market for a U.S. product, promote a new U.S. product, or promote a new use for a U.S. product, rather than promote the substitution of one established U.S. product for another;
- Sample commodities provided under a QSP project must be in sufficient supply and available on a commercial basis;
- The QSP project must either subject the commodity sample to further processing or substantial transformation in the importing country, or the sample must be used in technical seminars in the importing country designed to demonstrate to an appropriate target audience the proper preparation or use of the sample in the creation of an end product;
- Samples provided in a QSP project shall not be directly used as part of a retail promotion or supplied directly to consumers. However, the end product, that is, the product resulting from further processing, substantial transformation, or a technical seminar, may be provided to end-use consumers to demonstrate to importers consumer preference for that end product; and

- Samples shall be in quantities less than a typical commercial sale and limited to the amount sufficient to achieve the project goal (*e.g.*, not more than a full commercial mill run in the destination country).

- Projects should be completed within one year of CCC approval.

QSP projects shall target foreign importers and audiences who:

- Have not previously purchased the U.S. commodity that will be transported under QSP;
- Are unfamiliar with the variety, quality attribute, or end-use characteristic of the U.S. commodity;

- Have been unsuccessful in previous attempts to import, process, and market the U.S. commodity (*e.g.*, because of improper specification, blending, formulation, sanitary, or phytosanitary issues);

- Are interested in testing or demonstrating the benefits of the U.S. commodity; or
- Need technical assistance in processing or using the U.S. commodity.

B. Award Information

Under this announcement, the number of projects per participant will not be limited. However, individual projects will be limited to \$75,000 of QSP reimbursement. Projects comprised of technical preparation seminars, that is, projects that do not include further processing or substantial transformation, will be limited to \$15,000 of QSP reimbursement as these projects require smaller samples. Financial assistance will be made available on a reimbursement basis only; cash advances will not be made available to any QSP participant.

All proposals will be reviewed against the evaluation criteria contained herein and funds will

be awarded on a competitive basis. Funding for successful proposals will be provided through specific agreements between the applicant and CCC subject to the availability of funding. These agreements will incorporate the proposal as approved by FAS. FAS must approve in advance any subsequent changes to the project.

C. Eligibility Information

1. Eligible Applicants: Any United States private or government entity with a demonstrated role or interest in exporting U.S. agricultural commodities may apply to the program.

Government organizations consist of Federal, State, and local agencies. Private organizations include non-profit trade associations, universities, agricultural cooperatives, state regional trade groups, and profit-making entities.

2. Cost Sharing: FAS considers the applicant's willingness to contribute resources, including cash, goods, and services of the U.S. industry and foreign third parties, when determining which proposals to approve for funding.

3. Proposals should include a justification for funding assistance from the program – an explanation as to what specifically could not be accomplished without Federal funding assistance and why the participating organization(s) would be unlikely to carry out the project without such assistance. Applicants may submit more than one proposal.

D. Application and Submission Information

1. Address to Request Application Package: Organizations are strongly encouraged to submit their QSP applications to FAS through the Uniform Export Strategy (UES) application Internet Web site. The UES allows applicants to submit a single consolidated and strategically

coordinated proposal that incorporates requests for funding and recommendations for virtually all of the FAS marketing programs, financial assistance programs, and market access programs. The suggested UES format encourages applicants to examine the constraints or barriers to trade that they face, identify activities that would help overcome such impediments, consider the entire pool of complementary marketing tools and program resources, and establish realistic export goals.

Applicants planning to use the Internet-based system must contact the FAS/Program Operations Division to obtain Web site access information. The Internet-based application may be found at the following URL address: <https://www.fas.usda.gov/ues/webapp/>.

Although FAS highly recommends applying via the Internet-based application, as this format virtually eliminates paperwork and expedites the FAS processing and review cycle, applicants also have the option of submitting an electronic version of their application to FAS at podadmin@fas.usda.gov.

2. *Content and Form of Application Submission:* To be considered for QSP, an applicant must submit to FAS information detailed in this notice.

In addition, in accordance with 2 CFR Part 25, each entity that applies to QSP and does not qualify for an exemption under 2 CFR §25.110 must:

- (i) Provide a valid DUNS number in each application or plan it submits to CCC;
- (ii) Be registered in the System for Award Management (SAM) prior to submitting an application or plan; and

(iii) Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by CCC.

Similarly, in accordance with 2 CFR Part 170, each entity that applies to the QSP and does not qualify for an exception under 2 CFR §170.110(b) must ensure it has the necessary processes and systems in place to comply with the applicable reporting requirements of 2 CFR Part 170 should it receive QSP funding.

Incomplete applications and applications that do not otherwise conform to this announcement will not be accepted for review.

Proposals should contain, at a minimum, the following:

(a) Organizational information, including:

- Organization's name, address, Chief Executive Officer (or designee), Federal Tax

Identification Number (TIN), and DUNS number;

- Type of organization;
- Name, telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address of the primary contact person;
- A description of the organization and its membership;
- A description of the organization's prior export promotion experience; and
- A description of the organization's experience in implementing an appropriate

trade/technical assistance component;

(b) Market information, including:

- An assessment of the market;

- A long-term strategy in the market; and
- U.S. export value/volume and market share (historic and goals) for 2009-2015;

(c) Project information, including:

- A brief project title;
- Amount of funding requested;
- A brief description of the specific market development trade constraint or opportunity to

be addressed by the project, performance measures for the years 2016-2018, which will be used to measure the effectiveness of the project, a benchmark performance measure for 2014, the viability of long-term sales to this market, the goals of the project, and the expected benefits to the represented industry;

- A description of the activities planned to address the constraint or opportunity, including how the sample will be used in the end-use performance trial, the attributes of the sample to be demonstrated and its end-use benefit, and details of the trade/technical servicing component (including who will provide and who will fund this component);

- A sample description (*i.e.*, commodity, quantity, quality, type, and grade), including a justification for selecting a sample with such characteristics (this justification should explain in detail why the project could not be effective with a smaller sample);

- An itemized list of all estimated costs associated with the project for which reimbursement will be sought;

- Beginning and end dates for the proposed project;
- The importer's role in the project regarding handling and processing the commodity

sample; and

- Explanation as to what specifically could not be accomplished without Federal funding assistance and why the participating organization(s) would be unlikely to carry out the project without such assistance;

(d) Information indicating all funding sources and amounts to be contributed by each entity that will supplement implementation of the proposed project. This may include the organization that submitted the proposal, private industry entities, host governments, foreign third parties, CCC, FAS, or other Federal agencies. Contributed resources may include cash, goods or services.

3. *Submission Dates and Times:* QSP funding is reviewed on a rolling basis during the fiscal year as long as remaining QSP funding is available as set forth below:

- Proposals received by, but not later than, 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time, [INSERT 60 CALENDAR DAYS AFTER PUBLICATION DATE], will be considered for funding with other proposals received by that date;
- Proposals not approved for funding during this review period will be reconsidered for funding after the review period only if the applicant specifically requests such reconsideration in writing, and only if funding remains available;
- Proposals received after 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time, [insert 60 calendar days after publication date], will be considered in the order received for funding only if funding remains available.

4. *Other Submission Requirements:* All Internet-based applications must be properly

submitted by 5 p.m., Eastern Daylight Time, [insert 60 calendar days after publication date], in order to be considered for funding; late submissions received after the deadline will be considered only if funding remains available. All applications submitted by email must be received by 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time, [INSERT 60 CALENDAR DAYS AFTER PUBLICATION DATE], at podadmin@fas.usda.gov in order to receive the same consideration.

5. Funding Restrictions: Proposals that request more than \$75,000 of CCC funding for individual projects will not be considered. Projects comprised of technical preparation seminars will be limited to \$15,000 in QSP funding. CCC will not reimburse expenditures made prior to approval of a proposal or unreasonable expenditures.

E. Application Review Information

1. Criteria and Review Process: Following is a description of the FAS process for reviewing applications and the criteria for allocating available QSP funds.

FAS will use the following criteria in evaluating proposals:

- The ability of the organization to provide an experienced staff with the requisite technical and trade experience to execute the proposal;
- The extent to which the proposal is targeted to a market in which the United States is generally competitive;
- The potential for expanding commercial sales in the proposed market;
- The nature of the specific market constraint or opportunity involved and how well it is addressed by the proposal;
- The extent to which the importer's contribution in terms of handling and processing

enhances the potential outcome of the project;

- The amount of reimbursement requested and the organization's willingness to contribute resources, including cash, goods and services of the U.S. industry, and foreign third parties; and
- How well the proposed technical assistance component assures that performance trials will effectively demonstrate the intended end-use benefit.

Proposals will be evaluated by the Commodity Branch offices in the FAS' Cooperator Programs Division. The Commodity Branches will review each proposal against the factors described above. The purpose of this review is to identify meritorious proposals, recommend an appropriate funding level for each proposal based upon these factors, and submit proposals and funding recommendations to the Deputy Administrator, Office of Trade Programs.

2. *Anticipated Announcement Date:* Announcements of funding decisions for QSP are anticipated during October 2015.

F. Federal Award Administration Information

1. *Award Notices:* FAS will notify each applicant in writing of the final disposition of the submitted application. FAS will send an approval letter and agreement to each approved applicant. The approval letter and agreement will specify the terms and conditions applicable to the project, including the levels of QSP funding, and any cost-share contribution requirements.

2. *Administrative and National Policy Requirements:* The agreements will incorporate the details of each project as approved by FAS. Each agreement will identify terms and conditions pursuant to which CCC will reimburse certain costs of each project. Agreements will also outline the responsibilities of the participant, including, but not limited to, procurement (or

arranging for procurement) of the commodity sample at a fair market price, arranging for transportation of the commodity sample within the time limit specified in the agreement (organizations should endeavor to ship commodities within 6 months of the effective date of the agreement), compliance with cargo preference requirements (shipment on United States flag vessels, as required), compliance with the Fly America Act requirements (shipment on United States air carriers, as required), timely and effective implementation of technical assistance, and submission of a written evaluation report within 90 days of expiration or termination of the agreement.

QSP projects are subject to review and verification by FAS' Compliance, Security and Emergency Planning Division. Upon request, a QSP participant shall provide to CCC the original documents that support the participant's reimbursement claims. CCC may deny a claim for reimbursement if the claim is not supported by adequate documentation.

3. *Reporting:* A written evaluation report must be submitted within 90 days of the expiration or termination of each participant's QSP agreement. Evaluation reports should address all performance measures that were presented in the proposal.

G. Federal Agency Contact(s)

For additional information and assistance, contact the Program Operations Division, Office of Trade Programs, Foreign Agricultural Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Courier address: Room 6512, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250, or *by phone:* (202) 720-4327, or *by fax:* (202) 720-9361, or *by e-mail:* podadmin@fas.usda.gov.

Signed at Washington, DC on the 1 st _____ of _April_____, 2015.

Asif Chaudhry,
Acting Administrator, Foreign Agricultural Service, and
Vice President, Commodity Credit Corporation.
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